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Columbia University in the City of New York | New York, N.Y. 10027

SPECIAL SERVICE PROFESSOR AND
UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR EMERITUS

Fayerweather Hall

4 February 1985

Dear Arnold,

A short note by way of rectifying Josh's remembrance recorded in the enclosure. With his, to me incredible, memory, Josh is surely in the right church but not quite in the right pew.

It must have been a good many years ago that I once remarked to him that the planning group had assumed that an institution such as the CASBS would be required only for a relatively short transitional phase -- say, for 5 to 10 years. The reasoning seemed evident at the time. The primary identified need was to enlarge the cadre of social scientists at the forefront of social and behavioral research who, in turn, would be the better able to train and educate the great numbers of graduate students flocking into these fields after the war. That Center was thought of as an interim institution that would help achieve that objective, in speeded-up tempo, by providing close association of young talents already in the field with more experienced scholars at the forefront, this under the unique condition of relieving all of the scholars from all other obligations during the course of the Center year. Some 35 or so young talents would join a core of 10 to 15 established scholars for the year, the latter group also benefitting from intensive interaction among themselves and with the younger Fellows. In ten years, the approximately 500 scientists who had returned to their home base (or to other educational institutions) would be the better able to multiply their kind. Once this process was well under way, the Center, as a national enabling institution, would no longer be required. A clear case of a 'socially expected duration' reflected, incidentally in the great debate over appropriate buildings to house the temporary Center; to wit, to keep investment in plant to a minimum.

As I remember, and Ralph Tyler could check that memory for you, the planning group also assumed that the nascent Ford Foundation would not want to endow an institution such as the Center in 'perpetuity.'

Wildly optimistic as this pro-tem orientation may seem today, it made some sense to us back then. For at that time, of course, the magnitudes of social and behavioral scientists were of a different order.

Having heard all this once some years ago, Josh characteristically stored the account in his memory bank, with its enormous assets and practically no liabilities. In the course of time, as I reconstruct it, the story accrued interest and became somewhat transformed into the memory trace that the planning group had assumed that we would put ourselves out of business in relatively short order by "having solved most pressing social problems." Optimists we were, but not that optimistic.

A historiographic and methodological aside: if none of this appears in any written document, so much the worse for



documentation as the sole legitimate resource of 'the' historian. An extreme version which asserts that documents, and documents alone, can authenticate historical realities is, I suggest, a largely unrecognized by-product of the circumstance that history ordinarily dealt with the comparatively remote past -- 'remote past' being operationally defined as a past with no participative survivors being accessible to the historian at the time he undertook his interesting and informative labors. But when historians deal with relatively contemporary history -- operationally defined as a period in which participative survivors are in sufficient supply to enable cross-checking of oral accounts -- then an exclusive resort to documentation can become a misplaced methodological dogma. It then becomes a case of what Kenneth Burke observed long ago of a quite different phenomenon: "being fit in an unfit fitness."

Documentation of course remains indispensable for providing a foundation for historical reconstruction and interpretation of the 'recent past.' But with the new technologies of fugitive interaction -- for an instance, unrecorded telephone conversations -- much can slip through the interstices of the written record.. .

Now, how did I get engaged in this methodological sermon? I only intended to say that you can check my memory of this not-uninteresting component of the story which Josh's memo recalls to mind by consulting with the others of the planning group -- I should suppose, especially Ralph Tyler, -- and later, Frank Stanton, who may remember it in connection with the original concept that the Center should purchase or even rent an existing building or set of buildings since it was not intended as a 'permanent' institution or one of indefinitely extended duration (the latter a special kind of SED [socially expected duration]). But perhaps there is even something of this to be found in the archives.

And speaking of archives, have you managed to get access to Barney Berelson's archive? Is there one? at the University of Chicago? It, of course, should provide a rich harvest.

But now the sun is up. And so back to my labors: the final revision of a short Preface to a new edition of OTSOG on its 20th anniversary -- this having been proposed, to my delighted surprise, by Bill Jovanovich. And so I must get the Vicennial Edition off to a fresh start with a preface that hints at its character and contexts.

Harriet joins me in affectionate regards.

→ cc: Josh Lederberg

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